

# Guidance for Early Childhood Education Providers Requirements and Best Practices

## Updates:

**02/16/2022**

- Outdoor masking strongly recommended but not required in crowded settings when physical distancing is not possible or practical.
- Changes in upgraded mask information for students including cloth (reusable) masks that meet criteria for upgraded masks.

## Welcome

Given the ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 and the predominant presence of the **Omicron variant**, masking indoors regardless of vaccination status, is essential to slowing the spread of COVID-19 at events, within businesses, and in the community. The Omicron variant of the virus spreads much more easily than other strains of the virus. To prevent a surge in COVID-19 cases, it is important to diligently follow the requirements and best practices described in this guidance.

Per published reports, factors that increase the risk of infection, including transmission to people more than 6 feet away, include:

- **Enclosed spaces with inadequate ventilation or air handling** that allow for build-up of exhaled respiratory fluids, especially very fine droplets, and aerosol particles, in the air space.
- **Increased exhalation of respiratory fluids** that can occur when an infectious person is engaged in physical exertion or raises their voice (e.g., exercising, shouting, singing).
- **Prolonged exposure** to these conditions.

Below is a summary of requirements and best practices for early care and education (ECE) providers to enhance safety and lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission within their ECE settings as they transition to full operations. In addition to this information, please remember:

- ECE providers must comply with applicable [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards](#) (ETS) and the LA County Health Officer Order. Please note that the directives in the LA County Health Officer Order must be followed when they are stricter than the Cal/OSHA ETS.
- ECE providers should review and follow the [general guidance for businesses](#). The best practices for ECE described here are intended to supplement the general guidance.
- ECE providers should review the [Exposure Management Plan Guidance for Early Care and Education Sites](#), described in more detail below.

## Follow mask rules for employees, children, and visitors

The current Los Angeles County [Health Officer Order](#), requires all individuals, regardless of vaccination status, to wear a mask in all indoor public settings and businesses. This order, and the state's requirement for masking at child-serving sites, applies to children 2 years (24 months) and older, employees, staff, volunteers, parents, and all visitors. Some exceptions to the masking requirement still apply as noted below. Based on these rules, ECE providers and sites must:

## Guidance for ECE Providers

- **Visitors:** Require all visitors, including parents and caregivers, regardless of vaccination status, to [bring and wear masks](#) when they are **indoors** at their facility. It is strongly recommended but not required that visitors also wear masks outdoors when in crowded ECE settings where distancing is not possible or practical. Make masks available to those who arrive without them.
- **Children:** Require all children ages 24 months and older to wear a face mask **indoors at their facility**. It is strongly recommended but not required that students also wear masks outdoors when in crowded ECE settings where distancing is not possible or practical. **It is strongly recommended but not required that children wear upgraded masks which at a minimum are well-fitting, non-cloth masks of multiple layers of non-woven material with a nose wire. (Cloth masks meeting ASTM standards for high filtration efficiency (ASTM F3502-level 2) also meet standards for upgraded mask recommendations. See [ph.lacounty.gov/masks](http://ph.lacounty.gov/masks) for more information.)** Nothing in this protocol requires that the ECE site provide upgraded masks to enrolled children. **However, universal masking with some appropriate type of face covering is required indoors in an ECE program.** Masks may be removed during nap time or when children are eating and drinking.
- **Employees: Requirement to provide upgraded masks to all ECE employees:\*** At this time, all ECE employees must be provided with and wear surgical-grade masks (also referred to as medical procedure masks) or higher-level PPE (e.g., KN95 or N95 respirator masks) when indoors. For those wearing surgical masks, double masking, with a cloth face covering worn over the surgical mask, is recommended for enhanced protection. Cloth face coverings alone are no longer acceptable, as they do not provide the same level of source control or personal protection as a proper surgical mask or higher-level PPE.
  - Consider also offering gloves for tasks such as serving food, diapering, handling trash, or using cleaning and disinfectant products.

\*Some independent contractors are considered as employees under the State Labor Code. For more details, check the California Department of Industrial Relations' [Independent contractor versus employee](#) webpage.

## Screen and respond to cases

- [Entry screenings](#) are strongly recommended to be conducted before employees enter the ECE site.
  - Entry screening should include a check-in concerning cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing and fever or chills and if the employee is currently under isolation or quarantine orders. Temperature checks are recommended if feasible.
  - These screenings can be done in-person upon arrival at the site or remotely before arrival using a digital app or other verifiable approach.
- Post [signage](#) to remind everyone who enters your establishment that they should NOT enter if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or if they are under isolation or quarantine orders.
- Exclude any person or isolate any child or staff showing symptoms of a contagious disease or illness until they can be transported home, as required by CDSS Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) and pursuant to [Title 22 in CCR sections 101216\(h\), 101226.1\(a\)\(1\) and 102417\(e\)](#).
  - Isolate children who begin to have COVID-19 symptoms while in care, from other children and staff.
  - Ensure that isolated children continue to receive adequate supervision and that the health of the child is continually observed throughout the day according to licensing requirements.
- Follow public health guidelines for [quarantine](#) or [isolation](#) if an individual who resides in a family childcare home is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.

## Guidance for ECE Providers

- ECE providers must notify LA County DPH officials, CCLD staff, and families of any confirmed case of COVID-19.
- Follow the [COVID-19 Exposure Management Plan Guidance in Early Care and Education Sites](#) for reporting COVID-19 cases to DPH.
  - Individual cases (1 case) should be reported within 1 business day.
  - Clusters of 3 or more cases occurring within 14 days should be reported immediately to DPH. Report outbreaks to the CDSS Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) through their local Regional Office as required pursuant to [Title 22, CCR section 101212\(d\)](#).
  - Family childcare homes must report a communicable disease outbreak, when determined by the local health authority, to CCLD through their local Regional Office pursuant to Title [22, CCR section 102416.2\(c\)\(3\)](#).
- Refer to the [ECE COVID-19 Toolkit](#) for additional information on reporting and managing infections and exposures in the workplace.

## Consider maintaining physical distancing and stable groups

Although physical distancing is no longer required at ECE sites, it is an additional tool for infection control that can be used at ECE sites to reduce the spread of COVID-19. If possible, consider implementing the following measures:

- **Maintain well defined cohorts.** Early care and education settings typically have a stable group model with the same groups of staff and children together each day. ECE providers should consider steps to maintain a clear separation between groups throughout the day. If feasible, this can help reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread if a child or staff person comes to the site infected.
- **Stagger drop-off and pick-up times to reduce crowding.** Consider making it easier for parents and guardians to drop children off at the beginning and end of day to stagger how many children arrive and leave at the same time and prevent crowding at the entryway.
- **Use visual aids to remind children to maintain distance from others.** Help children practice physical distancing throughout the day by using visual aids, like tape on the floor or pictures to remind them to maintain their distance from other children and staff.
- **Take steps to make meals safer:**
  - For employees, staff, and volunteers, maintain an outdoor break area where employees can take their breaks. Employees should eat outdoors or alone in a closed office. If employees must eat indoors, they should be distanced by at least 6 feet (about 2 arm lengths) from others if in a shared indoor eating area.
  - For children, consider having meals outdoors if space and weather permit. When eating indoors, consider moving tables to spread children out or use tape and pictures to indicate where children can sit and help to provide adequate spacing between children.
- **Consider [use of barriers](#)** and partitions between cubicles to protect staff who are not fully vaccinated and have frequent close contact with other employees or visitors.

## Improve ventilation

- Make sure your building's HVAC system is in good, working order.

## Guidance for ECE Providers

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- Consider installing portable high-efficiency air cleaners, upgrading the building's air filters to the highest efficiency possible, and making other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in all working areas.
- Consider how to safely bring fresh air into the facility. When weather and working conditions allow, increase fresh outdoor air by opening windows and doors. Consider using child-safe fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows; always position window fans to blow air outward, not inward.
- When opening windows is not possible because of outside weather conditions, it is important to adhere to infection control measures to reduce risk of spread, like proper masking and physical distancing.
- Decrease occupancy in areas where outdoor airflow cannot be increased.
- If your business utilizes transport vehicles, such as buses or vans, it is recommended to open windows to increase outdoor airflow when it is safe to do so and weather permitting.
- See CDPH [Interim guidance for Ventilation, Filtration, and Air Quality in Indoor Environments](#) and CDC [Ventilation in Schools and Child Care Programs](#) page.

## Clean and disinfect

Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces can reduce the risk of infection. Train and monitor staff to follow infection control practices related to requirements for cleaning and disinfection, housekeeping and sanitation principles listed below:

- Follow cleaning and disinfection requirements as laid out in [CCR sections 101216\(e\)\(2\)](#), [102416\(c\)](#), [101238\(a\)](#) and [102417\(b\)](#).
- Laundry, such as clothing and bedding, should be washed using the appropriate hot water setting and allow items to dry completely. If handling dirty laundry from a person who is sick, wear gloves and a mask.
- When choosing cleaning products, consider using those approved for use against COVID-19 on the [EPA-approved list "N"](#) and follow product instructions for use.
- The [Healthy Schools Act](#) requires that anyone using disinfectants at childcare centers complete annual California Department of Pesticide Regulation-approved training. Online training can be found by going to the [California School & Child Care Integrated Pest Management](#) website. Note: This does not apply to family childcare homes.
- For more information about cleaning and disinfection, see CDC guidance on [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#).

## Encourage vaccination

COVID-19 vaccines are [safe and effective](#) and are the best way to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks in the workplace and in the community. COVID-19 vaccine is free and [widely available](#) in every community.

- Provide paid time off for vaccination and booster doses.
- Consider offering a [vaccination clinic](#) at your workplace to make it more convenient for your employees to get vaccinated. Consider opportunities to incentivize your employees to get vaccinated or to make it easier to get vaccinated. This might include offering rewards such as additional paid time off or cash bonus payments, and/or policies that are more relaxed for employees who are [fully vaccinated](#) against COVID-19.

## Guidance for ECE Providers

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### Support handwashing

- Place handwashing stations or hand sanitizer at entry and outside communal bathrooms with signage promoting use. Be sure that hand sanitizer is out of the reach of children. Supervise children under the age of 6 when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol or contact with eyes.
- Encourage frequent handwashing among children and staff.
- See the CDC guidance, [When and How to Wash your Hands](#).

### Communicate

- Post [signage](#) so that visitors who are entering your building are aware of policies, including the requirement for all visitors, employees, and children over 24 months to wear a face mask **while indoors**.
- Update your parent manual and share any new policies with parents.
- Use your online platforms to communicate your COVID-19 safety policies to the public.

### Coping with stress

As the world continues to combat COVID-19, many are facing challenges that can be stressful for both adults and children. Many of us and many of the families we serve may feel more concerned, worried, and fearful for our own health and the health of our loved ones. It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you, a family you serve or someone else you know is having a hard time coping, help is available 24/7 by calling the LA County Department of Mental Health's Helpline 1-800-854-7771. Help is also available via a text that says "LA" to 741741 or simply by calling the family physician of the person in need of support. The webpage <http://dmh.lacounty.gov/resources> includes tips to help manage stress and improve your emotional health.

Below are a few resources and recommendations to help in dealing with stress:

- California's playbook on [Stress Relief during COVID-19](#) provides guidance on how to notice stress in kids and outlines tools and strategies on how to reduce stress for children and adults.
- Promote healthy nutrition, sleep, physical activity habits and self-care.
- Discuss and share stress reduction strategies with colleagues and families.
- Encourage staff and children to talk with people they trust about their concerns and feelings.
- Communicate openly and often with staff, children, and families about mental health support services available in the community, including if mental health consultation is available to the program.
- Consider posting signage for [CalHOPE](#) and the National Distress H: 1-800-985-5990, or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746.
- Encourage staff to call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255), 1-888-628-9454 for Spanish, or [Lifeline Crisis Chat](#) if they are [feeling overwhelmed with emotions](#) such as sadness, depression, or anxiety; or call 911 if they feel like they want to harm themselves or others.